

Annual Report of the Fostering Service

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Our key priorities for 2022

To increase the number of Durham County Council Foster Carers across the board.

- In 2022-23, we recruited 12 new foster families and de-registered 33 foster families, giving us an overall decrease of -21 mainstream foster families. This challenge has been recognised nationally and moving forward into 2023-2024 Durham Fostering Service will be part of a Pathfinder Pilot scheme which is being run across 12 North East Local Authorities.

Review the marketing strategy to attract and retain a wider group of fostering families who are able to offer a range of fostering options for our children in care.

- We have continued to focus our marketing on social media campaigns, tv and radio adverts, digital campaigns, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), local magazines etc. We were able to run another tv advert at the beginning of 2023

Continue to improve the timeliness and quality of family finding across the service.

- We have worked hard over the past year to find the right family for our children and have had 33 matches approved and are now only actively searching for 7 children/young people.

Reduce unnecessary placement moves for children and young people and strengthen the matching arrangements for them.

- Approximately 72% of our children in our care live in a fostering arrangement whether that be in house, IFA or with connected foster carers. From March 2022 through to March 2023 we have seen the percentage of children living within, in house carers drop from 56% to 50%, with IFA's increase slightly from 24% to 26%. There has been an increase of connected foster carers from 20% to 24%.



Use reporting data to better understand how our fostering service is performing and prioritising key areas of activity across the service.

- We continue to use Liquid Logic and now have access to our performance data daily via the BI reports. We can look at the recruitment data and cross reference with campaigns so we can see what has increased enquiries into the service and what campaigns have not worked as well as we hoped they would.

Evidence the good work we do in ensuring the voice of children and their carers informs the service we provide.

- We work very closely with the Children in Care Council in relation to improving the service and training new foster carers.
- We use the Mind of My Own app. This is to enable all children and young people, not just those involved in the Children in Care Council, to be able to share their views and worries at any time.
- As well as running Support Groups for our Foster Carers we also hold twice yearly consultations, where their views are sought about how they want the service to progress.

Review the training and support offer to our foster carers.

- Training has progressed down the hybrid route, following covid, as virtual training allows a lot more people to participate at any one time. Our Workforce Development Lead has worked very hard over the past 12 months to pull together a comprehensive training package.



Establish the first mockingbird hub and potentially have a second one up and running before the end of March 2023

- Our first Mockingbird Hub was launched on 19th September 2023 with a launch event being held on 1st October 2023. This first constellation has been very successful and has had a significant impact on the children and carers involved.
- The Fostering Network were impressed with how Durham has embraced this model they asked our Hub carers and Liaison worker if members of the Scottish Government could visit to see how successful it has been, as the Scottish Government considering promoting it across the Children's Services in Scotland. The visit took place on 29th March and was very successful with very positive feedback from the members who visited.
- We are now planning a second hub that will be launched in the summer of 2023.



Foster Carers Financial Support Available

- At the end of February beginning of March the Government made some recommendations in relation to the increase of age-related fostering allowances. Durham increase was 12.4% across all ages in line with this recommendation.
- As identified in last year's report we have reviewed our Payment For Skill's model and increased the payment for each level and this was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023. The new model has 3 levels linked to foster carers skills and experience, Accredited, Mainstream and Advanced, these replaced levels 2, 3 and 4. There is also a Specialist payment and this is linked to the needs of the child.



Key Priorities for 2023-2024

- ✓ To increase the number of Durham County Council Foster Carers across the board.
- ✓ Continue to work with the other 12 Local Authorities to make the Pathfinder Pilot a success to increase our recruitment of foster carers.
- ✓ Continue to provide a timely approach and good quality of family finding across the service.
- ✓ Reduce unnecessary placement moves for children and young people and continue to strengthen the matching arrangements for them.
- ✓ Use reporting data to better understand how our fostering service is performing and prioritising key areas of activity across the service.
- ✓ Evidence the good work we do in ensuring the voice of children and their carers informs the service we provide.
- ✓ Continue to build on the success of our first Mockingbird Hub and launch our second hub in the summer of 2023.
- ✓ Expand the capacity within the Connected Carers team to improve our offer to connected foster carers pre and post the making of an SGO.
- ✓ Align the Kinship Care and Support Team more to our Connected Carers Team to improve the offer and support to our SGO/CAO carers both pre and post order.
- ✓ Review and improve our training offer to our Connected Foster Carers.